1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK 4
Qatar MK 3



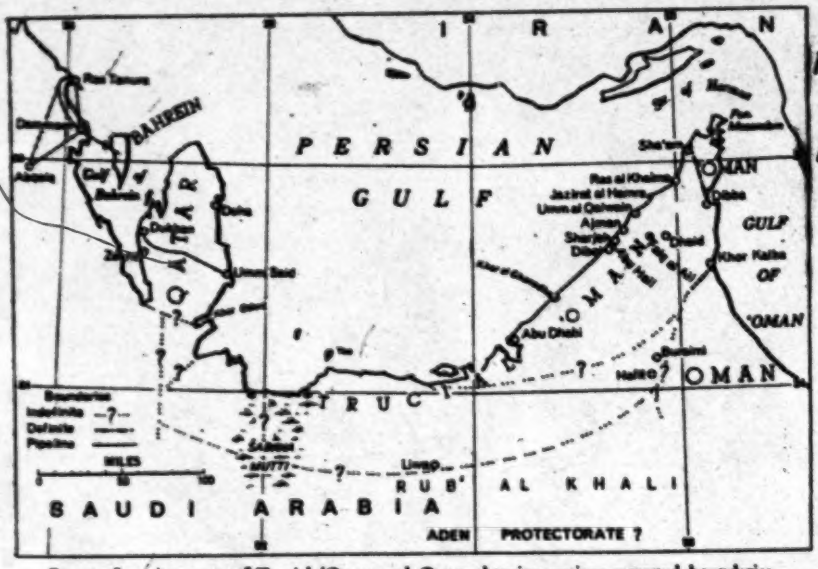


FIG. 1—Location map of Trucial 'Oman and Qatar, showing various reported boundaries.

number of cattle is small. Wells are far apart; many are brackish, and only a few have sufficient water for surface or subsurface irrigation. Thus the whole peninsula of Qatar contains only two or three struggling date gardens. Larger wells are reported below the foothills of the mountains of 'Oman, which explain the more extensive date gardens there (similar to those of the Batinah Coast, on the east side of the mountain range) and the cultivation of some cereals. The total population is small and largely migratory. Estimates range from 7000 to 25,000 for Qatar, and from 40,000 to 105,000 for the remainder of the coast, concentrated in the northeastern part; from the base of the Qatar peninsula to Abu Dhabi the coast is reported to be virtually empty of human beings today, except for a few Bedouins migrating from the inland wells of Liwa.[1]

Because of the scanty endowment of the land, occupations deriving revenue from the sea became dominant. The port of Sharjah was reported to send 350 boats to the pearl fishery and to have in addition about a hundred fishing boats.[2] Pearling is generally limited to a small but indented stretch of coast near this port, and receipts are believed to fluctuate substantially from year to year.[3] The growth of both fishing and pearling is assumed to be relatively recent since none of the earlier observers comment [illegible].

[1] W[ilfred] Thesiger: Across the Empty Quarter, Geogr. Journ., Vol. 111, 1948, pp. 1–21; reference on p. 9.

[2] S. B. Miles: The Country and Tribes of the Persian Gulf (2 vols., London, 1919), Vol. 2, p. 442.

[3] Raymond O'Shea: The Sand Kings of Oman (London, 1947), p. 132.

231 Rashid of Al Ajman, horses are not kept in Oman on account of the difficulty of obtaining suitable fodder.

433 The industries of the Persian Gulf are pearl diving, fishing, a limited amount of canning for export, date cultivation, ship-building, ochre mining, and wool-weaving, but of these the pre-
228 eminent industry is that of the pearl banks. In summer most of the
464 able-bodied men repair to the pearl banks, some returning in November to take part in the fisheries, although the majority stay at home in idleness and are supported by means of loans advanced by the boat owners and contractors. Having 'subbed' on their next season's wages, they are legally bound to work for the same pearler, and the system is such that they are in effect bound to him for life. It is no uncommon thing for a contractor to claim the services of a son whose father has been killed by a shark, or drowned, in liquidation of the debt owed by the deceased diver, and the whole business starts again through the next generation.

In July, 1944, I saw a diver who had been mauled by a shark eighteen feet below the water. His calf and the thigh of one leg had been bitten away to the bone, and he had spent five days in a
[752] dhow before being brought in. The wound, which had been soaked in henna, was very putrid and full of maggots. He was placed in the sick quarters and the maggots were allowed to continue their work of devouring the rotten flesh. Within six weeks the wound had healed up sufficiently for the man to go home. He said he would return to diving again as soon as he was well!

67 175

a number of the camels which had been collected for safety at Dhaid while their owners were absent on a foray in the Batinah district.

In November, 1843, in consequence of an attack by Ghafalah on a Dubai caravan, Sheikh Maktum carried fire and sword into the country of that tribe and of the Na'im, who were allies of Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr, which led to a rupture between the two sheikhs. An inhabitant of Sharjah having been killed by the hand of a brother of Sheikh Maktum, a crisis again occurred, and again passed over harmlessly. Finally, a direct collision took place in the interior between the Ghafalah and the Sheikh of Dubai and several men were killed on either side. The Sheikh was victorious but lost the sight of one eye.

Petty tribal wars continued throughout the century. They 721
were never on a large scale or serious enough to interfere with British interests in the Gulf, because the sheikhs were so jealous of one another that to combine was out of the question. The political game was played at its wiliest, and the practice of a sheikh was to play one ally off on another. If they had only acquired sufficient wisdom to settle their disputes amicably, co-operate on such matters as land reform, agriculture and water supply, the Oman Coast to-day might be a flourishing centre of Arab life. Instead of this, 311
the major part of it is uncultivated desert, because the people have no incentive to irrigate the land and plant cereals and vegetables; that this can be done with considerable success is evidenced by the flourishing gardens at Sheikh's Wells and at Ras-al-Khaimah.

It has never been the policy of the sheikhs to better the lot of 511
their subjects, however; as long as the people are unemployed for 228
half the year, they can be relied upon to work hard at the pearl banks during the pearling season, and thus make enough money to carry them on for several months without working. It is a pernicious system, but the pearling-fleet owners argue that if the people were regularly employed on other occupations, such as agriculture or sheep rearing, they would have no desire to go to the pearl banks and the industry would languish for want of labour.

Another reason for the gradual cessation of tribal wars was the 228
pearling industry, which is the most important feature of Arab life in the Gulf, and which necessitates the absence of a large proportion of the male inhabitants at the pearl fisheries during the two seasons of the year—April to June, and July to October. Since from

earliest times the sheikhs have derived a considerable proportion of their incomes from profits of the pearl trade, it is in their interest to pool their efforts during the season and abstain from hostilities. The only men who are not allowed to take part in pearling are the sheikh's soldiers and guards, who are continually on duty, and are not allowed to leave their respective towns without permission. They are usually recruited from various tribes, never from a single tribe; so that there is little danger of disaffection or of combination against their employer.

Our own guards at the Fort, who numbered about forty men, were supplied by the Sheikh of Sharjah, but they were not natives of Oman. Known as Askharis, they originate from the hill districts of Muscat, and are noted for their fearlessness and toughness as fighters. They were a villainous-looking lot of ruffians, but I got to know them individually very well indeed, and liked them immensely. They were always fond of a joke and had a broad sense of humour, even if it was sometimes childish. I could trust them implicitly, as they were possessed of a dog-like loyalty and would have laid down their lives for me. They were immensely proud of their responsibility in guarding the Fort, and were extremely hurt on one occasion when I asked Cranley to provide an R.A.F. guard for an aircraft which, owing to an engine change, had to be retained at Sharjah for the night. They considered that they should have been entrusted with the task, and sulked about it for days. The reason for my action was not distrust of the Askharis or their capabilities as guards, but the simple fact that according to our regulations a British military guard must be provided for aircraft.

They were paid rather badly by the sheikh, and in consequence were invariably on the cadge for food and items of discarded clothing. These requests were usually made through their leader, Khofan, a fine-looking old man with a silky white beard, who was a past master in the art of asking favours. He was so courteous and kindly that it was difficult to refuse him. One of his most persistent requests was that I should provide his men with a barousti hut outside the Fort, so that in wet or cold weather they would not have to make the journey to Sharjah. I should have liked to give him his hut, but unfortunately we had no labour or materials and the Public Works Department attached to the R.A.F. were far too busy with camp enlargements to be able to oblige me.

I have mentioned that tribal wars were largely due to a lack of

# CHAPTER X

FROM the roof of the Fort one has a fine view of the surrounding desert. Due south-west the muddy creek curves like a snake past the little town of Khan, a dependency of Sharjah. Only the tops of the houses and the slender minaret are visible, since Khan is hidden by sand-dunes and an enchanting copse of date palms. The palm trees thicken as one looks further south, marking the beginning of the flourishing plantations which screen the town of Dubai, ten miles distant. Khan consists of about a hundred houses, and is ruled by a headman; the inhabitants are fishermen, pearl divers and sponge collectors. There is a very small boat-building industry, whilst some charming brass-bound chests are made there by native craftsmen; these chests are made of teak wood and are usually lacquered, after the Kuwait fashion. The sponge industry is unimportant and is confined to a few families. Men and women wade into the creek at low tide to collect the sponges, which are coarse and of an extremely poor grade. They cannot be exported and are used by the local Arabs.

Sharjah, a large rambling town of about 10,000 inhabitants, lies one mile north-west of the Fort, from which one has a fine view of the half-ruined fort, from one of the towers of which flies the sheikh's personal flag—a scarlet square with a wide white border. This fort, or 'palace', which lies at the back of the town, was built for strategic reasons with its gateway facing the open desert. The Khan Bahadur told me that it is about four hundred years old; the towers and the gateway were erected by the Portuguese, who established military and trading outposts on the Persian Gulf coast in the seventeenth century. Old ships' cannons, taken from the wrecks of British and French merchantmen, ornament the front of the fort; some bear the Admiralty anchor or the Royal insignia, G.R. III, and though rusty and time-worn, are still fired by the sheikh during tribal wars or on festive occasions.

The Persian Gulf was the haunt of pirates until almost the end of the nineteenth century, and the waters around Sharjah and Dubai were infested with these cruel and bloodthirsty sea-brigands,

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



to India, are about two hundred feet long and of several hundred tons. They have a high poop deck and a lofty covered gallery at the stern, which give them the appearance of galleons; in fact, they are said to owe their design to the Portuguese vessels which sailed these waters in the seventeenth century.

The timbers are caulked with glue and lime and the highly polished hulk is preserved with shark's oil. Oars are used to manœuvre the vessels when in shallow water, and these sometimes attain a length of nearly thirty feet and require half a dozen men to handle them. To witness the pearling fleet as it sets out at sunset for the pearling beds, at the beginning of the season, is an experience long remembered; the sky is radiant with purple and gold, and the silhouettes of the sails, like bats' wings, dance on the sparkling sea. It is a picture suggestive of peace, but to the foreigner of a hundred years ago those sails must have been symbols of menace.

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## CHAPTER XIII

437 HASSAN BIN AHMIDFA, the young pearl merchant, walked into my office at the Fort one morning and placed a little cardboard box on my desk. He helped himself to one of my cigarettes and smiled slyly as I opened the box. Under a layer of cotton wool there were a dozen gleaming white pearls. I took them out and placed them in the palm of my hand; they had a moon-white lustre, their surface reflected my face like a mirror, and there was a sheen of pink, green and gold in their texture.

'Sougini,' remarked Hassan, referring to their quality. That is, the second-best grade. He knew I was interested in picking up a few pearls if I could get them cheaply enough, and said he had managed to buy these from a friend. They were not of the finest quality, but the season had only just begun and one could only get the lower grades now.

I asked him how much they were. He shrugged and picked up a pear-shaped pearl, the size of a large pea, and balanced it in his hand.

'This weighs about eight *chaus*,' he said. 'You can have it for ninety rupees.'

I pushed the box away. 'Too much,' I answered. 'What do you take me for—a Maharajah?'

'It is worth much more, sahib,' he grinned. 'You can have the lot for three hundred rupees—but I will not sell this one for less than ninety.'

That was arithmetic I could not follow. The pearls all looked of similar quality to me, and I could have twelve of them for three hundred rupees; yet if I chose to buy one pearl I must pay ninety rupees. Again I examined them closely, but could detect no flaws. I took my cheque book from the drawer and paid him three hundred rupees; then we had a cup of coffee, English style, to seal the bargain. Hassan was perfectly honest and I have never regretted my purchase.

229 Pearls are the life-blood of the Persian Gulf, and more than half the populations of the towns and villages in Oman work at the

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



oyster beds during the season. In the little season, that is from April to May, only pearls of inferior grade, including the dull and greyish *singabasi* pearls, are found, although there are exceptions. The Gulf on the Arabian side is lined with oyster-pearl beds, although the largest are at Bahrain where they can be seen from the air in the green, translucent water. There is a good bed a few miles north-west of Sharjah, and another beyond Ras-al-Khaimah. Persian Gulf pearls are the finest in the world; the geological formation of the sea bottom and the temperature and shallowness of the water are said to be favourable to the pearl-oyster's growth.

The history of the Arabian pearl fisheries is shrouded in the mists of time; no one knows when they were discovered or exported to other countries. It is likely that King Solomon's pearls came from the Gulf, and the Maharajah of Jodpur told me that Sharjah and Bahrain pearls were exported to India at least a thousand years ago. Next to oil they are the most important product of Arabia although, unlike oil, they are subject to the dictates of fashion and the market is apt to be temperamental. At one time fantastic prices were paid for a single pearl of matchless beauty, and millionaires gave hundreds of thousands of pounds for a necklace; with the discovery of the cultured pearl, however, the market began to drop and prices had only a temporary recovery to their former high rates owing to the war.

During the war practically no pearls were exported to Europe or the United States, and in England the one hundred per cent purchase tax caused them to lose favour with the public. Many women now prefer cultured pearls, with their fine lustre and even shape, to natural pearls which are difficult to match. Although a small quantity of Persian Gulf pearls was smuggled into Europe between 1939 and 1945 by ships and aircraft, the bulk of pearl stocks was exported to India, by way of the great market at Bombay. Prices were strictly controlled by the Bombay stockbrokers and it was actually cheaper to buy them in India than in the Gulf.

Large cargoes of pearls of every grade and quality were despatched regularly by air from Bahrain and Sharjah and I myself have handled a consignment valued at 200,000 rupees. It was contained in a drum the size of a four-pound cocoa tin, tightly wrapped in linen gauze and heavily sealed. The package, which weighed about eight pounds, contained several hundred pearls of finest quality and was heavily insured. These sealed tins formed a normal part of our daily cargo and the merchants used to queue

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



228 439 up outside the traffic office at the Fort just before the arrival of the aircraft, to have them weighed, insured and locked up in the safe. Only one package was ever lost in transit, and in this case the insurance company paid the consignors compensation after investigations lasting three years.

228 434 Pearl fishing is the principal source of wealth among the people on the Arabian side. It has been estimated that, if the supply of pearls were to fail—either owing to a disease among the oysters or sterility due to poisoning of the beds—the effect would be disastrous; the ports of the Trucial Oman Coast, which have no other resources, would practically cease to exist. The purchasing power of the inhabitants of the eastern coast of Arabia depends almost entirely on the pearl fisheries. In normal times about five thousand boats are employed in the industry, and more than seventy-four thousand operatives are engaged, not taking into account their families. Apart from the divers and boats' crews there are numerous capitalists, large and small, with their dependents whose funds are invested in the industry.

439 The value of the trade varies with the demand; in 1833 the annual value of pearls exported from the Gulf was only £300,000; in 1886 it was £400,000; in 1904 it was only £30,439—an extremely poor season—whilst prior to the war it reached the high figure of £1,500,000. Whether in the near future the annual turnover will again exceed the million mark depends on two factors: the dictates of fashion, and the condition of the oyster beds.

228 Hassan's family have been engaged in the pearling industry for three hundred years, and he knows as much about pearls as any man. He can judge the weight of a pearl exactly by balancing it in his hand, and estimate its texture by scraping its surface with his teeth.

437 Many merchants carry a tiny pair of jewellers' scales with them, for business deals are often carried out in the café or even in the street. Many are sold on commission by 'agents' and I have even had pearls offered to me by bearers, coolies and guards.

228 825 Hassan told me a great deal about the pearling industry, although some of the Arab lore is hardly scientific. Thus, if there is a poor crop, the natives often ascribe this to shortage of rain. There is a tradition that the young and shell-less oysters come to the surface when it is raining, or the moon is full. The raindrops are the seeds of fertility, while the moon produces lustre; the rain is the father of a good pearl and the oyster the mother. It is a poetical notion, and no one has disproved its truth.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



There are three kinds of pearl-producing oysters in the Gulf; 228
the *Mahharah*, the pearl-oyster proper, which is a most prolific source, which is found all over the Gulf from just below the low-water mark to eighteen fathoms; the *Zanniyah*, which are found in the vicinity of Ras-al-Khaimah; and the *Scdaifiyah*, which does not often yield pearls, but has been known to produce specimens of large and fine quality. The *Mahharahs* grow to about two inches in diameter and are collected when two or three years old. Pearl-oysters are prone to disease and the effects of submarine gases; some years ago a chemical disturbance occurred in the sea-bed off Bahrain. The sea became reddish and turbid, and oysters on some of the beds were found to be dead or diseased and produced no pearls.

The Arabs call the pearl *lulu*, and the Persians *marwarid*, and [192]
although both of these terms are frequently heard in the trade, the commonest word in Oman is *qumash*, which also means piece-goods. According to Professor W. A. Herdman, one of the world's greatest experts, the formation of a pearl in an oyster is an abnormal occurrence, and is usually caused by the intrusion of a minute parasite—the opaque, white, globular larva of a cestode worm (*genus Tetrarhynous*). While it inhabits the body of the oyster it is from .07 to .53 millimetres long. It has a curious history. At first it is a free-swimming larva in the sea; at this stage it makes its way into the oyster where it is surrounded by a cyst of nacreous matter. If the oyster is not disturbed the cestode then passes into the file-fish, which preys upon the oyster, and reaches its final or adult stage in the shark or ray, by which in its turn the file-fish is devoured —a curious example of the vicious circle of life. Dr. Kelaart, who died in 1859, was the first scientist to connect the formation of pearls with vermin parasites.

Not all pearls are 'cyst' pearls, however; some are due to causes other than parasitic invasion. Also, only about one cyst in a hundred is pearl-bearing. There are 'muscle' pearls, the interiors of which contain a tiny calcareous concretion, and 'ampulla' pearls, the nucleus of which may be a grain of sand or some other inorganic particle. Another common variety is the so-called 'blister' pearl, attached to the interior of the oyster shell; it is formed by the irritation caused by boring animals which work through from the outside. These can hardly be considered as pearls and have little value.

Pearls vary greatly in colour, shape and quality, yet these are

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228 factors which govern their value, in addition to specific gravity. The principal colours are white, pink, yellow or gold, blue, grey and black. Black pearls (called by the Arabs 'dead' pearls) are usually dull and of impure colour; they generally crack after a year or more. Few black pearls of high value have been found in the Gulf, the finest varieties coming from Mexico. All the black pearls that I saw were no larger than seed pearls. Parti-coloured pearls are not uncommon; they are mostly black or brownish, with white or bluish variegations.

Besides pearls of spherical or pear-shaped form, symmetrical probably because they have developed in a soft medium, malformed pearls of various types occur in the Persian Gulf as they do elsewhere. Of these the commonest are the hemispherical 'button' pearl, flattened on one side, perhaps by contact with the shell, and the hollow, irregularly shaped 'blister' pearl. Small pearls generally, whether round or deformed, are called 'seed' pearls, which is an English term. They are sold by bulk, and are used for grinding into medicinal powders, or as decorative beading for women's dresses in India and Persia.

The experts of the Persian Gulf assert that the largest, whitest, heaviest and most perfect pearls are obtained in deep water, while the shallow beds, though prolific, yield pearls of less specific gravity and invariably tinged with a shade of some colour. This stain of colour they attribute to the influence of the light of the sun, and they hold that there is a tendency to distortion in pearls grown between islands and the mainland, and that deep water is favourable to perfect sphericity as well as to lustre and to the other qualities
228 which give the pearl its value. The Arabs estimate the fineness
485 of pearls by an imaginary number of 'coats'. They say that the Karachi pearl has only one coat, the Ceylon pearl three, the Red Sea and Sokotrah pearl five, while the ordinary pearl of the Persian Gulf has no less than seven. The truth is, of course, that the pearl forms on the shell in layers or skins, rather like an onion. Pearls can be skinned, and a poor-looking specimen may be found to have a perfect interior.

Pearls exceeding thirty grains Troy in weight are seldom obtained in the Gulf, and the smaller sizes are numerous in proportion to their smallness. One of the finest Persian Gulf pearls on record was found in 1867 in sixteen fathoms of water near the island of Sheikh Shu'aib; it was purchased by a merchant for 15,000 Qrans, sold in Paris the following year for £8,000, and

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was eventually purchased by a Baniyah and brought to India to make an eye for an idol. In 1899 a native of Mumzar, a subject of the Sultan of Oman, found a valuable pearl which he sold to the Sheikh of Sharjah for £2,000. This gave rise to litigation lasting for several years and almost ended in war between the Sultan and the Sheikh. Eventually the pearl reached Bombay where it was valued at 400,000 rupees. The matter was referred to the Arab court, or *Majlis*, which gave judgment in favour of the Sultan, ruling that he was entitled to the net price received by the owners. The pearl, after remaining unsold for some time in London, was brought back to Bombay and disposed of there for 1,000,000 rupees. The Sultan's share should have been 30,000 rupees but, owing to the cost of litigation and mortgages, he had to content himself with 12,000 rupees.

Hassan was one of many of the Arab pearl merchants who make a living by acting as brokers or commission agents; a few own boats and trade direct with India, but the most important men in the pearl trade are the Indian brokers or buyers with headquarters in Bombay. The most influential broker in Oman was Jam Shan, a large, dignified Parsee whose house in Dubai I frequently used to visit. In appearance he was very like the Aga Khan, and was reputed to be enormously wealthy. Before the war he used to travel extensively to Europe and America, and had connexions with Cartier in Paris and London. Persian Gulf pearls sold by Mr. Jam Shan to Cartier were purchased by the Duchess of Windsor for £20,000, and a single pearl which was originally bought for £6,000 was finally sold to Miss Barbara Hutton, the American heiress, for £15,000.

Jam Shan had a single room in his house which he used as an office. He and his assistants used to sit on the floor counting and sorting the hundreds of thousands of pearls (some as tiny as a pinhead) which the merchants brought to him in bagfuls. Exceptionally large and fine pearls, of 30 grains Troy and upwards, he used to buy singly. There is no recognized method of assessing their value, except by the lustre and sheen. The intermediate and smaller sizes, which form the staple of the pearl trade, are valued according to size, weight, colour and shape. Their valuation demands great technical knowledge. Medium pearls are assorted into size by being passed through a series of perforated bowls, called *tasah*, made of brass or copper, which fit into one another,

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so as to form a nest. Some pearl dealers keep as many as forty-five sets, graduated according to their perforations. The weighing of pearls is a most complicated matter, but very simply a pearl is rated in *chaus*, a Bombay measure, which is one three hundred and thirtieth part of a *maskal*, which is made up in turn by 100 *dokras*. A *chau* is really a unit of value as well as a weight, and changes according to the number of pearls being valued together. Thus, two pearls, weighing exactly half a third of a pearl, would not be estimated so highly in *chaus* as the single pearl. The finest pearl I saw in Jam Shan's collection was valued at £8,000, or nearly £75 a *chau*.

If the valuation of pearls is a complicated affair the financial organization of the industry is even more so. The industry teems with merchants, brokers, middlemen, agents, and moneylenders. First the pearl fleet has to be financed before it can go to sea, and money has to be provided for the crews and divers. This is advanced partly by the owners of the boats and partly by a special class of moneylenders called *Musaqqams*, who demand ten or twenty-five per cent interest. Every boat is commanded by a captain, or *Nakhuda*, who receives a percentage of the catch; sometimes he is the owner of the boat. Next in importance to him is the *Ghasah*, or diver, followed by the *Siyub*, or hauler, the *Radhif*, or extra hand, and the *Walaid*, or apprentice, whose duty it is to catch fish, cook, look after the pipes and coffee, and attend to other minor duties.

The *ghasah*, whose only work is to dive, are mostly poor Arabs and free negroes or slaves, and their efficiency depends more on their skill and daring than on the strength of their constitution. A slave diver who is not afraid to enter deep and muddy water containing weeds is ordinarily valued at considerably over a thousand rupees. The *siyub*, whose duties are merely to manage the boat and to lower and pull up the divers, are usually landsmen whom age or other causes have obliged to abandon diving. The total crew of a pearl boat varies from ten to forty men, the average number being sixteen. All sorts of boats are used for pearling, even jollyboats being fitted out for the purpose, but the majority are sambuks, batils, bagarahs and shuais. A large boat, holding forty men, will cost 30,000 rupees or more to construct and fit out.

There are two principal seasons for pearl diving: the *Ghaus-al-Bard*, or cold-diving season, which lasts from April to May, and the *Ghaus-al-Kabir*, or 'great diving', beginning in June after the end

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of the Shamal wind and lasting until the end of September. The beginning of this season is known as the *Rakbah*, and the closing as *Quffal*. At Sharjah the second season sometimes lasted until late in October, although the seas usually begin to get cold at this time of the year.

In addition to the seasons for pearling at sea there is also a winter season for shore operations, known as the *Mujannah*. Pearl fishing by this method consists in wading in the shallows along the coast when the tide is out, and those who take part in it ordinarily return to their homes at night. The pearls obtained in the *Mujannah* are usually small and discoloured, although the pearl which caused the dispute between the Sultan of Oman and the Sheikh of Sharjah was found by a wader at Kumzar.

Until recent years the pearl fishers had neither charts nor compasses, but they are extremely expert in finding their way to any bank they wish to reach; in their primitive navigation they are guided by the sun and stars as well as by bearings from the land when in sight, and also by the colour and depth of the sea and the nature of the bottom. The choice of a bank is limited by the diving powers of the divers. Eight fathoms is an ordinary depth, and twelve perhaps the greatest at which work can be carried on without discomfort. Beyond this the strain is too great to be endured long and may result in fatal accidents. Before entering the sea the *ghais* strips off his clothes, places a pair of horn pincers on his nose to compress the nostrils, plugs his ears with cotton wool or bees' wax, and puts on leather finger-stalls to protect his fingers against abrasions. He also attaches a small bag of coir matting round his neck or waist. He is lowered into the sea by means of a long rope with a noose in which he places his foot, and a stone or lead sinker weighing ten or more pounds.

On reaching the bottom the diver removes his foot from the noose and proceeds to grope along the bed with one hand and one foot, using the second foot to propel himself and the disengaged hand to collect oysters. It is said that oysters are generally found open-mouthed, but close up when approached. When he cannot hold his breath any longer the diver signals to the *siyub* by jerking the rope and is immediately hauled up. A diver normally remains below the surface for forty or seventy-five seconds, although one minute is the average; in favourable weather he will make as many as fifty plunges in a day. It is rarely that a diver is attacked by a shark (*jarjur*) or dog-fish, but a few years ago an unusual number

of sharks made their appearance off the banks and attacked nearly thirty divers, two of whom were killed under water, the others being rescued in a precarious condition.

Diving is carried out every day during fine weather, work commencing an hour after sunrise and ceasing an hour before sunset. The interval between the early morning prayer and the start of diving is spent by the crews in opening the oysters collected on the previous day. This is done with crooked knives called *mufaliq*, under the superintendence of the *Nakhuda*, who weighs and registers the pearls. The stench arising from this operation must be smelt to be believed. Before they start work the divers are allowed a light meal of half a pound of dates and a few cups of coffee each. Once they have entered the water work is continued without intermission until *Dhuhr*, about 2 p.m., when it is suspended for prayers, a few cups of coffee, and an hour's rest. After *Maghrib*, or evening prayers, the divers take a substantial meal of fish, rice and dates and then, after a little smoking and coffee-drinking, retire to rest for the night.

Divers sometimes suffer from the stings of the devil-fish, and when there are many of these about they wear a long white shirt to protect them from their embraces. Although a very fatiguing occupation, diving is not particularly injurious to the health, and is practised even by old men. In some cases it gives rise to diseases of the respiratory system and to deafness. Skin disease is a common ailment amongst divers, who guard against it by rubbing themselves with *jaft*, a concoction made from the inner shell of the Persian acorn. Senna leaves and other herbs are taken in cases of sickness, but if serious illness occurs, recourse is had to cautery with a hot iron.

Pearl diving is nearly always an hereditary occupation. The reason for this is purely economic. During the off-season the divers have to provide for their families and are often too lazy to undertake any other kind of work, although a few take up fishing. Being an extravagant class, they soon spend the money they have made from diving, and are obliged to borrow from the *Nakhuda*. They are seldom able to repay this debt, the interest on which accumulates, and the only way in which it can be repaid is by means of annual instalments deducted from their diving pay and bonuses. Thus a family of divers, to the second or third generation, may be indebted to a *Nakhuda* or his heirs and, unless the diver finds an alternative means of repaying the debt, he must continue diving to the end of his days, and his son after him.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



The *Nakhuda* himself is very seldom free from debt, for the expenses of fitting out and provisioning the boats and of retaining the services of capable divers and making them advances, often as much as 3,000 rupees per season, make him equally dependent on the *Musaqqams*, or moneylenders. Should a *Nakhuda* be unable to pay off his debts, the *Salifat-al-Ghaus*, or 'Diving Court', a tribunal set up by the sheikh of the district, may order his boats to be sold and his divers to be handed over to the creditor, although his house and other personal property is exempt from seizure. Usually, however, the court fixes an annual instalment for the discharge of the debt, and the *Nakhuda* is then free to form relations with another *Musaqqam*, if he can find one willing to finance him in these circumstances. These rules, although drastic, are very necessary to protect the pearling industry from financial loss.

The diving court has other functions, one of which is to enforce the 'laws' of the industry as regards the engagement of labour, rates of interest, supervision of taxes due to the sheikhs, and the maintenance of a standard of quality of the pearls sold in the open market. Dealers who charge excess prices for pearls, or who pass bad or spurious pearls for those of first quality, are severely reprimanded or even suspended from trading, whilst the man who dares to bring a false or 'cultured' pearl into the Gulf is liable to be outlawed by the sheikh.

It is interesting to watch the brokers haggling over a heap of gleaming pearls in the market. It would take the average European several minutes to work out a price, but the Arab merchant, even when otherwise illiterate, is usually a clever mathematician and benefits by the fluctuations of market rates and by the discrepancies of the weighing appliances in use in the Gulf. Some experts, generally sea-going *Tawwashes*, or dealers, profess a power to distinguish roughly the depth of water and even the particular neighbourhood from which a pearl shown to them may have been obtained; thus they assert that pearls from the banks near Bahrain are marked by greater lustre, and those from banks further northward by greater 'solidity'. They all possess an uncanny ability to sum a pearl up at a glance, and the success of the individual trader depends chiefly upon his power to appraise the relative fineness of pearls belonging to the same class, and he has no set rules to assist his judgment.

The largest pearls are sent to India to be sold individually by the *chau*; but, in the assortment of the remainder into packets—

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



each packet containing pearls of the same class, but not necessarily of the same size—the ingenuity of the dealer finds further scope, for each of such packets, if skilfully made up, commands a higher price than the pearls comprising it would obtain if disposed of separately. Dealers are consequently averse from breaking up their packets and a fancy price must generally be paid for a single pearl selected from a packet of which the remainder are not taken.

The sheikhs of the Arab littoral derive considerable revenue from the pearl fisheries, but only as a means of taxes imposed on their subjects or on traders resident in their territories. The Trucial Oman sheikhs are also entitled to receive a share in the sale price of any pearl worth £50 or more which may have been found by one of their subjects, but no particular share is specified. The tax is called *Taraz*, and is sometimes assessed at the rate of one diver's share for each boat, and the sheikh is supposed to provide out of this revenue the services of watchmen to guard the towns and villages while the able-bodied males are absent. The *Taraz* is a poll tax on operatives and the *Nob*, also collected by the sheikhs, a tax on boats. Much confusion is caused by irregularity in collection of the taxes, the people always endeavouring to pay as little as possible and the sheikhs to take as much as they can, and that in advance. It is not surprising that the profession of tax-collector is highly unpopular in Arabia.

The rights of the pearl fisheries are very jealously guarded and the operatives are protected by the British Government. Only Arabs and the subjects of the sheikhs are allowed to undertake pearl diving in the Persian Gulf, and foreigners, diving suits, and any form of mechanical device are strictly barred. The effect of competition with Europeans furnished with scientific appliances and the use of deep-sea dredging, would tend to destroy the colonies from which the oysters upon the shallow beds accessible to native divers are recruited. Moreover, the appearance of European rivals would arouse great animosity on the part of the Arabs, who regard the fisheries as their common but exclusive inheritance, and for this reason alone the British Government has always opposed foreign entry—even that of British subjects—into the Gulf pearling industry.

In spite of Government opposition, however, the lure of the pearl trade has proved too great to prevent attempts by foreigners to compete in the industry, and several syndicates have been formed in the past with a view to exploiting the beds. Permission to

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



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operate has been refused in every case, and ships which have ventured into the Gulf with the object of sending down divers in secret, have been impounded and their takings, if any, confiscated. In 1882 a steamer, the *Johnstone Castle*, was chartered by a Bombay syndicate and proceeded without official sanction to the Bahrain pearl banks. News of the expedition soon reached the Political Resident at Bushire, and he despatched a Government vessel to arrest the steamer. The total gains of the party during the five days that they had been at work were represented by only twenty-three small seed pearls.

Numerous abortive attempts to work the beds with modern diving apparatus have been made since then, and in 1900 an Indian merchant actually had a trading agreement with the Sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Ras-al-Khaimah to operate in their territories, but the British authorities cancelled the arrangement on the grounds that it would arouse hostility amongst the pearling community. A year later the *Selika*, a small Belgian steam yacht, paid a visit to the Gulf. After leaving Muscat she disappeared for several weeks, reappearing suddenly at Bahrain. The crew admitted that they had spent most of the time in the neighbourhood of the pearl banks, and it was afterwards ascertained that on their return to Europe they had disposed of a quantity of small pearls.

In the same year the *Daily Express* announced that an influential German syndicate were negotiating with the Turkish 'Porte' for a monopoly of the pearl fisheries along the Ottoman shores of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, with a view to working them by scientific methods. The British Ambassador at Constantinople took the matter up with the Turkish Government, who denied all knowledge of the negotiations, and nothing further was heard of the syndicate or their scheme. In more recent years the Sponge Exploration Syndicate Limited, a company with a nominal capital of £1,000, registered in London, but directed chiefly by foreigners of various nationalities, attempted to exploit the beds. This company, which described its business as that of 'sponge, pearl and coral finders', unsuccessfully tried to obtain sanction from the Foreign Office to fish in the Gulf.

No assistance was given to them, but they succeeded in procuring a fifty years' concession and monopoly for sponge fishing in Persian waters. Under this authority some diving was carried on by Greek employees of the syndicate.

Prior to the 1914–18 war a Parisian jeweller, Madame Nattan,

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



228 477 came to Bahrain for the pearl season and remained there from the beginning of August until the end of October. She had some difficulty in establishing relations with the local dealers, who were prejudiced against carrying on business with a woman, but eventually she succeeded in buying pearls on the spot to the amount of 40,000 rupees (£3,000).

442 181 There is nothing to prevent anyone going to the Persian Gulf and buying pearls from the dealers, but there is very little likelihood that he will make a profit out of the transaction. The Arab is an extremely wily person and unless the greenhorn is lucky enough to obtain the friendly advice of an honest merchant, such as Hassan bin Ahmidfa he will, as likely as not, find himself saddled with rubbish. A life-study of pearls is necessary in order to be able to appraise their value, and even a Hatton Garden merchant who paid a visit to Bahrain or Sharjah would have to know something of the Arab character as well as of pearls. A woman singer who came to Sharjah with a concert party showed me a pearl necklace she had purchased in Bahrain; she told me she had paid £25 for it and seemed overjoyed with her 'bargain'. She lent the pearls to me to have them valued locally, and I showed them to Hassan. He eyed them with a look of contempt and handed them back.

'*Singabasi*,' he muttered, an Arabic word used to signify the bluish pearls of low value which have the silvery sheen of ball bearings. 'They are worth perhaps thirty rupees.'

30: Gt. Britain G-5 (ca. 1918) 1920 MJ1 Saudi Arabia
Trucial Oman MK4



and Ghāfiri political factions (see Chap. VIII, p. 240), the former being Sunnis of the Maliki sect, the latter virtually Wahabis, though not of the militant order. Modern rifles are widely distributed both in town and country, but the traffic in arms has now been virtually suspended (cf. p. 247).

### Industries and Trade

The most important industry is pearl-diving, which in summer employs most of the able-bodied men with more than 1,200 boats; though during the winter some of the divers take part in the ordinary fisheries (the second great industry of the coast), the majority take their ease, retained by the pearl-boat owners and contractors, by whom they are supported through the slack season. Agriculture employs the settled population of the interior; vegetables are raised by irrigation from wells in most places, and dates are also grown, though they seldom fully ripen S. of Ras el-Kheimah. Cereals only succeed in a few favoured spots such as *Sīr* in the Shameilīyah district. The live stock of the villages consists of camels, donkeys, cattle, sheep, and goats; horses are rare. The Bedouins subsist chiefly by their herds. In winter, when there is pasture, they roam far and wide; in the hot weather they gather about the more abundant wells, such as those of the *Jiri* plain in the N., and *Beinūnah* in the W.

Pearls are the most valuable export, and are sent almost entirely to India from the port of Dibai. The oyster-shells from which the pearls are taken come next in importance; it is questioned whether the practice of selling these, instead of at once returning them to the sea, may not in the long run tend to exhaust the pearl-banks. Dried fish are exported from Abu Dhabi.

The imports in order of their value are: grain and pulse, from India and Persia; cotton piece-goods from India; dates and date-juice from 'Irāq; coffee, chiefly from India; sugar, from or through India, and miscellaneous provisions from Persia. The only steamship port is Dibai, but the other coastal towns are used by native sea-going boats running to and from India, Persia, and 'Irāq. Inland trade with the Bedouins is of no great volume, but Trucial Oman shares that of the Bireimi oasis with the Sultanate. The coast between Ras Musandam and Abu Dhabi was formerly used as a base by smugglers of arms, bringing rifles and ammunition from Sohār through Bireimi, and loading for Persia and El-Qatar either at the coastal towns, or at lonely spots between them. Within recent years it was necessary to warn the Sheikhs of 'Ajmān, Shārjah,

133 offshore. The interior country in the north is hilly, with an average elevation of about 500 feet, but toward the southwest it becomes progressively flatter and more desolate. The portion from Abu Dhabi to Khor al Odaid is barren and virtually uninhabited.

132 The climate is particularly trying in the summer months from May to October, when temperatures of 115° F. and humidity readings of 90 to 98 per cent are frequently recorded. In contrast, the days from November to February are agreeably cool, while the nights often are cold. The rainfall is irregular, and normally approximates 4 to 5 inches a year. It is usually concentrated in sudden and violent storms during the mid-winter months.

## POPULATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

141 162 The population of Trucial Oman is not accurately known, but in 1951 it was estimated at about 80,000, including Bedouin 144 tribes totaling possibly 8,000. The settled inhabitants are of mixed racial stock. They are predominantly Arabs, but Negro admixtures, descendants of former slaves from Africa, and communities of Baluchis, Iranians 145 and Indians are prominent. Except for a few Hindus, the majority are Moslems. Most of the Arabs belong to the Wahhabi branch of the Sunni sect of Islam.

168 228 The chief occupations of the people are pearl diving, fishing, shipbuilding and date cultivation. Some of the best pearling reefs in the Persian Gulf are found off the Trucial Coast, and Dibai long has been recognized as the center of activity in the southern Gulf region. The industry has declined within recent years, but, in more favorable times, thousands of pearling vessels are said to have put out from Trucial Oman ports each season from early summer to November.

241 Agriculture is of secondary importance, being confined to areas in which water is available for irrigation. Date groves exist along the coast as far west as Abu Dhabi, and small amounts of millet, wheat, tobacco

244 and various vegetables are cultivated in the inland valleys. Cows, goats and other live-
133 stock are raised in the towns and the vil-
361 lages, but camels, goats and sheep are the mainstay of the Bedouin.

816 Ocher is mined on the offshore island of
471 Bu Musa, but no other mineral deposits of
135 commercial value are known to exist. The Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) Ltd., a subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company, holds concessions for the exploitation of the oil reserves of Trucial Oman, and is conducting exploratory operations in the area. The discovery of oil would undoubtedly have a revolutionary effect upon the economy and the standards of living of the people.

361 A large majority of the inhabitants dwell in the headquarters towns of the different sheikhdoms or in adjacent fishing or agricultural villages. Most of the towns are compact, with narrow, crooked streets, darkened by projecting balconies and matting canopies put up for protection from the sun. Dibai, the largest, is a walled town with an estimated population of over 20,000. Sharja, the second in size, is a settlement of 3,000 to 15,000 which is unwalled but surrounded by a fringe of palm thatch, or *barasti*, huts.
342 The homes of the wealthy merchants are of
361 two stories with wide balconies and spacious inner courts, but those of the poor are usually simple one- or two-room huts of mud brick or palm thatch. The Bedouin live in the traditional black goat's hair tents of the nomadic tribes. They move about with their herds, following fresh pastures in the winter and congregating around desert wells in the
361 summer. A few join the fishing or the pearl-
228 ing fleets during the summer season, while their families camp in the vicinity of the towns.

144 The nutritional habits of the people vary
571 with the racial, the social and the economic backgrounds of the diverse communities. Poverty and lack of adequate transportation facilities restrict the foodstuffs available to a large percentage of the population.
262 Dates, breads prepared from wheat or mil-

p. 312(6)

164 high degree of resistance as the result of
364 repeated exposure to infection. Enteritis
and diarrhea are responsible for a high
[165] mortality in infancy and early childhood.

164 Many persons harbor at least one species of intestinal worms. Occasional cases of tapeworm infection have been recorded, but the species was not specified. Ancylostomiasis and schistosomiasis are not known to occur.

### Diseases Spread Chiefly Through the Respiratory Tract

164 Tuberculosis is a major problem, and, as
146 elsewhere, the poor nutrition, the over-
515 crowded living quarters and the unhygienic
362 habits of the people favor the spread of the infection. Pulmonary tuberculosis apparently predominates, but other forms of the disease are frequent.

164 Pneumonia and influenza are prominent,
362 especially during the winter months, when
228 the palm thatch huts provide slight protection against the changeable weather conditions. Respiratory infections are regarded as an occupational hazard among the pearling crews.

164 Epidemics of smallpox are recurrent, and a large percentage of the children show pockmarks indicative of previous infection. Measles, mumps, chickenpox and other respiratory diseases of childhood are endemic.

### Diseases Spread or Contracted Chiefly Through Contact

Gonorrhea is widespread, and serious complications due to local methods of treatment are said to be numerous. Syphilis is common, but the extent of infection is uncertain. Cases of soft chancre also are reported.

Trachoma is one of the most frequent diseases in this area, affecting a large percentage of the population. Trichiasis, corneal ulcers and other serious manifestations of the infection are often seen. Conjunctivitis is general: many cases probably are infections in origin, and all undoubtedly are aggravated by the sand-laden winds.

164 Over 50 per cent of the individuals treated
[758] in the oil company dispensary in 1950 were suffering from conjunctivitis.

164 Skin infections are prevalent. Where
312 water is scarce the Moslem tribes sometimes
228 employ sand in the ablutions required according to religious rites. As a consequence, many acquire infections in existing abrasions of the skin. Ulcers on legs and arms are observed repeatedly. Skin diseases are reported to be particularly evident among the pearl divers.

164 Leprosy is present, but no studies have
361 been made to determine the distribution of the infection. Some tribes are said to ostracize lepers and to require them to live in segregated colonies.

### Diseases Spread by Arthropods

164 Malaria is highly endemic in the towns
136 and agricultural areas, while extensive outbreaks are reported from time to time. Transmission probably is most active from April to June and from October to January, as in the oases on the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. All forms of the disease are encountered, but outbreaks usually are attributed to *Plasmodium falciparum*. *P. vivax* predominated among the cases in which the type was determined at the oil company dispensary in 1950. Among 17 cases treated in that year, 5 were classified as due to *P. vivax*; 3, to *P. malariae*; 1, to *P. falciparum*; while 8 were not identified.

Outbreaks of sandfly fever and dengue fever are recorded occasionally, but the incidence of other arthropod-borne diseases is uncertain.

## SUMMARY

162 Trucial Oman, formerly designated as the
160 "Pirate Coast," comprises 7 independent
361 sheikhdoms on the eastern coast of Arabia, near the entrance to the Persian Gulf. The population is heterogeneous, although predominantly Arab and Moslem. In 1951, it was estimated at 80,000, including about 10 per cent belonging to nomadic Bedouin tribes.

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